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FORT LAUDERDALE

## New black social group gets in gear

A social networking group launched last week for affluent, successful black professionals is going beyond the norm.

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BY EILEEN SOLER  
SPECIAL TO THE MIAMI HERALD

ICABA World, a new networking association for black professionals debuted recently during a standing-room-only, who's-who event at Nova Southeastern University's H. Wayne Huizenga School of Business.

"Tonight is about people of color coming together and making connections with each other," said Pauline Grant, CEO of North Broward Medical Center. Grant was among 100 of South Florida's top black leaders in law and medicine who were honored during ICABA's inauguration Nov. 13.

ICABA, or Identifying, Connecting and Activating the Black Accomplished, was created by media and marketing leader Jerome Hutchinson Jr., a former sales manager for WEDR-FM, 99 JAMZ and past president of Greater Louisville Broadcasting Inc., Kentucky's first black television station.

Hutchinson, named one of Florida's top 50 Most Powerful Blacks in 2007 by Success South Florida Magazine, said ICABA is the first network that unites the black community's top professionals. The organization provides a website, a magazine directory with member profiles and events to promote professional relationships.

Other honorees were Dr. Calvin Shirley, the only surviving physician who worked two decades to achieve desegregation of Broward General Hospital in 1971; lawyer W. George Allen who in 1952 was the first black graduate of University of Florida; and Judge Ed Rogers, the first black judge of Palm Beach County in 1973.

"Over time, we set the standard for others to follow," said Shirley, 88.

The concept for ICABA was born after Hutchinson's wife, Pam, published the first Who's Who in Black South Florida in 2006. Soon, the couple began hosting social events for the affluent and connected. Pam Hutchinson died in 2007, but Jerome Hutchinson kept her vision alive.

"Eventually, everyone wanted more than another cocktail party and they started saying so. It was affirmation to go to the next level," Hutchinson said.

The website is the hub for the members-only association where anyone can learn more about the group, read a handful of featured profiles and check out current editorials from The Root, an online magazine written from the African-American perspective.

The first membership directory profiles 140 prominent professionals. Future members will be added based on recommendation and approval. Categories include healthcare, law, entrepreneurs, community leaders, academia and general professions such as upper-level management, architecture, finance and engineering. Another category will serve celebrities and sports, media, art and culture.

Feature sections will highlight members deemed Living Legends, Lumina 10 or Rising Stars. Power couples and high achieving organizations will also be showcased.

The directories will be published quarterly in hard copy.

Members-only events include recognition receptions, development conferences, dinners, art shows, concert outings, book clubs and even luxury spa days.

But first, 500 people gathered at Huizenga center's gallery to welcome the association with champagne toasts. The event continued with presentations at the Rose & Alfred Miniaci Performing Arts Center.

"This is a brand-new opportunity to have fluid access to talented professionals," said Ricardo Forbes, diversity officer for Baptist Health South Florida.

The celebration was also a history lesson and a glimpse into the future.

Shirley, an ICABA Living Legend, recounted the struggles of segregation and health care that he witnessed from 1949, when he began work at the "colored only" Providence Hospital, through 1971, when African-American patients were allowed treatment at Broward General.

"Segregation was rough," Shirley said. "We had our own hospital but not all that the patients needed, and when the population grew we didn't have room for more. I was an obstetrician and gynecologist but I saw everyone from babies to grandfathers because that was the way it had to be," Shirley said.

Today, Shirley's daughter, Dr. Carmen Shirley, is a family physician and one of ICABA's Rising Stars.

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Lawyer Eugene Pettis, of the Lumina 10, said he benefited from equality wars waged by those who came before him, including Shirley, who was his childhood doctor. It was a different world in 1985 when Pettis earned a law degree, but still he was the first African American hired by an all-white Fort Lauderdale law firm.

"We've come a long way, but I am a believer that there will always be a minority of people who want to limit us," Pettis said. "Tonight creates a healthy network of people of color in positions of influence. We can achieve more collectively."

For more information about ICABA World visit [www.icabaonline.com](http://www.icabaonline.com) or call 954-551-5614.



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